帝都の精霊大祭

精霊使いの剣舞

志瑞祐

Extra.1

Great Festival of the Spirits at the Imperial Capital

Part 1

"Hah—!"

With a silver flash, the slicing attack ripped through the darkness.

Jet-black feathers instantly scattered, disappearing into space as particles of light.

—But that was all.

There was no sensation of having inflicted a critical blow.

"...!"

"Fufu, what a shame, Kamito. But you've still got far to go—"

A flutter of gorgeous hair, bearing the color of night.

Accompanied by a swish of pale fingers in the darkness, lightning erupted in the next instant.

With an earsplitting crack, the dagger in the boy's hand shattered from one strike of lightning. This was an elemental waffe formed from a steel spirit with whom he had made a simple contract.

While clicking his tongue, the boy retreated. Drawing his backup weapon—a mithril dagger—he searched for the enemy presence lurking in the darkness.

(Where are you, darkness spirit—?)

While pouring divine power to make the blade glow and confirm his footing, the boy cautiously moved around.

This battle arena of the Instructional School, with its complicated landscape, was a place of death. One misstep would bring the same fate as those countless corpses that had been struck down into the bottom of the abyss.

Although the Instructional School's elders firmly believed this boy to be the reincarnation of the Demon King from a thousand years ago, they had no intention of safeguarding his life because of that.

Suppose he were to die here, then it would only mean that his capacity was insufficient to become the Demon King's successor. That was all.

Suddenly, the boy noticed slight movement in the darkness.

(Over there huh—)

Through instinct alone, the boy threw the dagger, infused with divine power.

—However, the presence had already vanished. Flashing silver, the blade flew across empty space.

"...!?"

"It's still too early for you to kill me—"

—Before he knew it.

The presence had moved to his back.

Pale fingers, soft and smooth, caressed the boy's neck.

Instantly, the lightning surging through his entire body made him lose consciousness.

Part 2

"...mito, hey, Kamito... Are you okay?"

"...Ooh, hmm..."

He felt a hand's cold touch on his forehead.

A ticklish feeling of hair came from his cheek.

From the comfort of light sleep, he opened his eyes slightly—

Only to see dusk-colored eyes looking at him with a worried expression.

"...!"

The boy—Kamito—hastily tried to get up, but she held his head down.

"You'll feel dizzy if you get up suddenly."

"...Don't treat me... as a child, darkness spirit..."

"Indeed you are a child. What a shame, as you are now, you cannot kill me."

Keeping Kamito's head resting on her lap, the girl chuckled.

She was the darkness spirit of the highest rank—Restia Ashdoll.

Sent to educate the Demon King's successor, she was his final and most formidable opponent.

Despite having defeated numerous fighters to obtain the Instructional School's number one seat at the mere age of nine, Kamito had yet to gain the upper hand over this darkness spirit, not even for one move or a half.

"...L-Let go of me..."

"Your body should still be numb. Just rest here for a while."

The slender fingers were gently caressing Kamito's hair.

Feeling like his strength had drained all of a sudden, Kamito could not help but relax his body.

"Yes, this is right. Until your paralysis subsides, I'll just tell a bedtime story."

"..."

Hearing that, Kamito gave up on resisting, closing his eyes.

This was because the bedtime stories she told were Kamito's only avenue for learning about the outside world, and it was very interesting information.

"...Go ahead if you want."

"How very unforthright."

The darkness spirit girl shrugged slightly.

"...Hmm, well then, let's talk about the imperial capital today."

"Imperial capital?"

"Yes. The Ordesia Empire's capital, Ostdakia. Have you heard of the name?"

"Something like the most magnificent city on the continent, right..."

Looking up at the sky, Kamito muttered.

"Indeed. It was the stronghold city built by the holy maiden Areishia who vanquished the Demon King a thousand years ago. Its outer walls are very solid with many guardian spirits protecting it. The city center is where the Nefescal

Palace sits, surrounded by a vast garden, with the residences of nobles around—
"

The darkness spirit girl talked about the imperial capital's details one by one.

However, this would be too concise to call a bedtime story. Her tone of voice was like reciting facts that had been prepared ahead of time.

Lying on the girl's lap, Kamito was already yawning. Her bedtime stories in the past were much more interesting, enough to pique the young Kamito's curiosity.

"I think that's enough about the imperial capital. Instead, I want to hear more about the mountain ranges where many dragons live inside the Dracunia Empire—"

"Haha, the imperial capital is very boring, huh?"

Restia smiled wryly and shrugged.

"But this is necessary information, you know?"

"...What do you mean?"

Just as Kamito asked in return...

"Don't go pouring useless information into the Demon King's successor, darkness spirit—"

Figures clad in gray robes appeared silently out of the darkness.

They were the absolute rulers of this facility—the instructors of the Instructional School.

"I'm just providing the necessary information for the mission."

Restia glared coldly at the old men.

Her voice was exceptionally cold, completely different from how she spoke to Kamito.

"Don't get ahead of yourself, darkness spirit."

"Never forget that we can seal you away any time."

"...Of course I know that."

Restia whispered. Her voice was trembling.

Kamito rose up from her lap.

"A mission for me?"

He asked the old men.

"Yes. Next, we are sending you to the imperial capital."

"The imperial capital..."

Looking back abruptly, Kamito saw Restia nodding affirmatively.

"You will steal the militarized spirits used in the Great Festival of the Spirits at the imperial capital"

The old men's ominous voices echoed in the darkness.

Part 3

—That was four days ago.

Infiltrating a caravan of merchants in the trade of spirit crystal smuggling, they had arrived at the imperial capital two days earlier through a trading city in the desert. After sneaking into the city, they lay low in a hiding place prepared by the Instructional School while gathering information.

This was a room with no windows in a cheap inn.

From outside the musty room, the cheers of large crowds could be heard.

(Finally, the day is here...?)

The Great Festival of the Spirits was a celebration held once a year in the imperial capital. Kamito's mission was to steal the militarized spirits that were scheduled to be unveiled during the festival.

After adjustments, militarized spirits could fetch astronomical prices on the black market, even if they were from ancient generations. The main buyers were small countries that were unable to develop their own military capabilities.

But this time, the militarized spirits to be stolen were no ordinary ones.

According to sources, the militarized spirits to be unveiled were originally from the seventy-two spirits used by Demon King Solomon before undergoing adjustments. Assuming this was true, it was hardly surprising that the old men of the Instructional School, being worshipers of the Demon King, would be willing to take the risk to obtain them.

(...Those two haven't been caught by the spirit knights, right?)

Teamed up with Kamito in this mission were the fighters ranked second and seventh.

Number Seven, Lily Flame, was in charge of gathering information in the imperial capital and securing avenues of retreat. Number Two, Muir Alenstarl the Monster, was to use her special ability to make spirits go berserk and attack the plaza where the princess maiden was going to dance as an offering to the spirits. As for Kamito, his task was to take advantage of the chaos during the attack to seize the catalysts where the militarized spirits were sealed. These were the main points of the operation.

Those two should be hiding somewhere else in the imperial capital but Kamito was not informed of the specifics. Regular communications was the responsibility of several spies in the city.

—Thud.

At this moment, the faint sound of a cup being put down was heard from a corner in the room.

"Kamito, how much longer are you going to stay in this gloomy room?"

Still sitting on the floor, Kamito opened one eye.

He saw the darkness spirit girl sitting in a chair, looking at him with an exasperated expression on her face.

"The mission begins after the princess maiden begins her dance performance. There's no need to go out."

Replying curtly with these two sentences, Kamito closed his eyes again.

Sitting on the floor with his hands in a meditative pose, he concentrated. Raising his focus in this manner before carrying out an important mission was his habit.

"You're wrong. Although it's a bit weird coming from me as a darkness spirit, do know that it's nice to be under the sun sometimes. On a rare visit to the imperial capital, how could you stay cooped in a room all the time?"

"Going out only increases unnecessary risk."

"Sigh, what am I going to do with you..."

Sighing, Restia stood up from her chair.

The gradually approaching presence forced Kamito to open his eyes.

"...W-What are you doing?"

"Listen carefully."

Smiling tenderly, Restia pulled Kamito's ear hard.

"...R-Restia... W-What are you doing!?"

"No matter how tolerant I am, there are times when even I get angry. Got that, Kamito?"

Rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble...!

Restia was giving off a dark aura from her entire body.

Faced with this top-ranked darkness spirit's astounding pressure, Kamito could not help but feel fear.

"I, starting yesterday, have felt extremely bored."

Bringing her smiling face close to Kamito, Restia showed no smile in her eyes.

"Very well, we shall go out—"

"Can't you just go out on your own?"

Despite Kamito's continued resistance, Restia grabbed him by the back of the neck.

"Kamito, this is a lesson."

"Lesson?"

"Yes. I am teaching you the techniques for melding into the crowd seamlessly when infiltrating cities."

Smiling, Restia forced Kamito outside.

Part 4

—Meanwhile at the same time...

Inside the Elstein family's alternate residence within the premises of the Nefescal Palace, a princess maiden presiding over this year's Great Festival of the Spirits was currently preparing for the dance performance.

"Wow, Nee-sama, you're so pretty!"

Seeing the princess maiden dressed in ceremonial garb, the girl with crimson hair exclaimed.

Her hair was styled into twintails on the sides of her head. Spinning rapidly, her ruby-like eyes looked very cute.

The girl's name was Claire Elstein.

She was the nine-year-old and second daughter of Duke Elstein.

"Thank you, Claire—"

Hearing that, the princess maiden smiled gently and responded.

She was Rubia Elstein, both Claire's blood sister as well as the Divine Ritual Institute's premer princess maiden, the candidate for the Fire Elemental Lord's next Queen.

Tasked with presiding over the final ceremony in this Great Festival of the Spirits, she was shouldering the most important mission.

"The bosom area of this ceremonial outfit is slight loose..."

Looking down at the gap in front of her chest, Rubia sighed. The fact that her bust was slightly smaller than girls of similar age did cause this princess maiden, who could be called perfect in all respects, a slight sense of inferiority.

"Just stuff something inside. It'll be fine."

"...I-I guess you're right. Claire, could you help comb my hair?"

"Sure, Nee-sama—"

Claire nodded and slowly combed the long crimson hair in a clumsy manner.

This gorgeous hair, resembling flames, mesmerized even Claire as the younger sister.

"I hope the summoning dance will finish peacefully without incident, Nee-sama."

"Rumor has it that the Lindwyrm being entertained as the main guest is especially difficult to please among the irritable dragon spirits. An inexperienced dance isn't going to satisfy him."

"Please don't push yourself too far. After all, your body is a bit frail, Nee-sama."

"My juniors at the Divine Ritual Institute said the same thing to me."

Rubia smiled.

"Don't worry, I won't overdo it."

She stood up straight.

Her noble and elegant mannerisms were making Claire exclaim wow, utterly impressed.

Embroidered with a fire dragon design, the white ceremonial outfit was custom made for this Great Festival of the Spirits. The coronet adorning her crimson hair was decorated with spirit crystals of varying sizes, serving to enhance this princess maiden's beauty.

Woof, woof!

—Just at this moment, barking could be heard from the mansion's courtyard.

"Good grief, how much longer will you make a lady like me wait!?"

Claire looked out the window to see an angry blonde girl with a white wolf.

"Oh no! I promised Rinslet-chan to walk around the festival with her!"

Covering her mouth, Claire began to get anxious.

"Don't mind me, go enjoy yourself at the festival."

Seeing that, Rubia placed her hand on Claire's head.

"O-Okay! I'll look forward to your dance performance, Nee-sama!"

Nodding, Claire frantically rushed outside.

Part 5

The bazaar located near the imperial capital's east gate was where merchants gathered from all over the continent. During the Great Festival of the Spirits, this was a place where massive crowds frequented the open-air stalls.

"The princess maiden this year seems to be the Duke Elstein's eldest daughter—
"

"Now that's a prodigy who entered the Divine Ritual Institute at the youngest age. This year's Great Festival of the Spirits is surely gonna be a success!"

Mixed among the noise of the lively festivities, two people were walking in the streets.

"Kamito, your gaze is too sharp."

"Shut up..."

Retorting unhappily, Kamito quickened his pace.

The two of them were dressed in long overcoats with their heads wrapped in stoles. This was typical attire of desert merchants.

Due to a large number of immigrants from the Alphas Theocracy living in the imperial capital's eastern zone, dressing like this in the crowd did not look out of place.

"Hey, wait up. Our cover story is a pair of siblings!"

Hearing that, Kamito halted and looked back.

"...You and I are merely traveling together due to a mission. Don't get in my way."

Sayng that, he prepared to start walking again.

"Okay, watch out or we'll get separated."

"Don't touch me, darkness spirit!"

Restia reached out to hold Kamito's hand but he shook her off forcefully.

The surrounding pedestrians looked at them in puzzlement.

"Sorry, nothing's going on here..."

Restia unwrapped her stole and glanced around.

Her dusk-colored eyes instantly produced a mysterious glow. In the next instant, people continued on their way, ignoring the two of them as though nothing had happened.

"Okay, let's go—"

"..."

With a very reluctant look, Kamito followed behind her.

The main street was filled with festive music. The fragrance of fruit could be smelled from open-air stalls.

Following Restia into a restaurant, the two of them took seats facing the street.

"...Phew, a festival sure is nice. I haven't been this free for a thousand years already."

Sitting on a chair, the darkness spirit girl stretched her arms comfortably.

Naturally, she had not manifested her jet-black wings on her back.

Placed on the table were two fruit parfaits that she had ordered. Kamito did not touch them, simply glaring at Restia.

"Why must I team up with you? I can do it on my own."

"If you were on your own, Kamito, you would've been caught by the Imperial Knights in no time, tortured and interrogated in Balsas Prison right now."

While eating the strawberries in the parfait, she glanced at the building towering in the center of the imperial capital.

It was said that inside the famous Balsas Prison was a jail specialized for imprisoning elementalists. Once captured, even an Instructional School combatant would find it impossible to escape.

"Torture doesn't work on me."

"...That's not the issue here."

Restia sighed in exasperation.

"Looks like it was correct for me to follow you—"

Saying that, she placed the other parfait in front of Kamito.

"Here, eat up."

"I'm fine with this. It's enough for three days."

Kamito shook his head and took out a small bag from his overcoat's pocket.

He poured out two or three pills from the bag.

This was food made by mixing several herbs with honey and drying it. Instructional School combatants would also carry these on their person during long-term missions.

"...Like I said, that's not the issue here. You're going to raise suspicions around you."

"...?" Hearing that, Kamito looked up with a surprised face.

Couples in the surroundings were looking at them with eyes of suspicion.

Restia silently reached out and took the bag of pills under the table.

"..."

Staring at the parfait, Kamito lowered his head without moving.

"What's the matter?"

Seeing Kamito frozen, Restia asked.

"...How, what's the right way?"

"Huh?"

"...This thing, how to eat it."

While looking away in embarrassment, Kamito asked quietly.

Restia chuckled then said:

"Very well, let me teach you."

Digging out a spoonful of ice cream, she extended it in front of Kamito.

"Open your mouth."

"...S-Stop joking around, I can eat by myself!"

"That won't do. We won't look like couples, right?"

Restia glanced at the couple on the adjacent table.

...The girl was asking the boy to say "ah~"

"Huh!? I thought our cover story was siblings—"

Yelling in panic, Kamito swiftly found his mouth stuffed by Restia's spoon.

"...!"

"How is it?"

(...What the heck!?)

Having almost forgotten the taste of sweetness, Kamito was entranced for a moment—

"—This year, it's Rubia-oneesama presiding over the ceremony."

Suddenly, the voices of two girls walking in the streets outside the restaurant could be heard.

"This year's Great Festival of the Spirits will surely be a success. In a few years, I'll make ritual offerings to the great Elemental Lords too!"

"Always nervous in front of crowds, you wouldn't be able to do it."

"Th-That's not true, I'll definitely become like Nee-sama in the future—"

"...There there. Look, it is already starting—"

Soon, the two gradually faded into the distance. Listening to their voices—

Kamito recovered a grim face like a fighter's.

"—Confirming the next move."

He lowered his voice as though muttering to himself.

"Once the Princess Maiden of Flame begins the ceremony, Muir's militarized spirit will take action. While the Imperial Knights are in turmoil, we will go steal the sealed spirits that were meant to be used in the ritual—"

Restia smiled faintly and wiped off ice cream that was sticking to Kamito's cheek.

"...!?"

"It's time to go—"

"There's still plenty of time before the mission."

"What are you talking about? It's not every day you get a festival, you know?"

Restia extended her hand towards Kamito who was still sitting in his chair.

"Come on, hurry up, will you?"

"..."

"Cover story is siblings, right?"

Lowering his head, Kamito held that hand.

"...Only because of the mission."

Part 6

While holding hands with Restia, Kamito walked along the noisy streets.

While the sun was setting, a large crowd began to gather in the plaza.

"The ritual is about to start..."

"Yes. Once the sun sets fully, the bell will ring in the city. Then a massive portable shrine will come out."

"Riding it will be the Princess Maiden of Flame, right?"

Looking up at the countless spirits flying in the night sky as balls of light, Kamito whispered.

Suddenly, Restia halted, causing Kamito almost to trip and fall.

"...What's wrong, darkness spirit?"

Restia was looking at a silver hair ornament displayed at an open-air stall.

"That's quite a pretty hair ornament. May I have a look?"

"Wow, you've got good eyes, miss. This is a silver ornament crafted in the Theocracy."

The stall's owner made a friendly smile and rubbed his hands together.

"Let me see."

Restia unwrapped her stole with a flutter of her long and gorgeous hair the color of the night.

Seeing her otherworldly beauty, the stall owner gasped.

"The mission above all. Don't act conspicuously, darkness spirit."

"Don't worry. ...Hmm, does it look good?"

Putting on the hair ornament the stall owner had handed to her, Restia looked slightly shy. It was a side to her that Kamito had never seen before, making a certain type of unknown feeling rampage in Kamito's heart.

"...Who knows."

Seeing Kamito look away, she smiled mischievously.

"Kamito, will you buy it for me?"

"...You can buy it yourself, right?"

"I didn't bring any money."

"If it's you—"

You can easily use mind control, right? Before Kamito could finish his retort, he found his lips—

Pressed shut by a swift index finger.

"Seriously, it's times like these that are only natural if the younger brother buys it for the sister."

Restia spoke softly in a sulking voice.

"...Is that really how it works?"

Even as the Instructional School's strongest fighter, Kamito knew almost nothing about this kind of common sense in the outside world. He wondered if the stall owner might get suspicious if he were to refuse stubbornly at this time.

"...Fine, I'll take this one."

Kamito paid the stall owner with a silver coin.

"Thank you, Kamito—"

Accepting the hair ornament, Restia smiled and knelt down in front of Kamito.

"Okay, could you help me put it on?"

"...Something so small, you can do it yourself, right?"

"Like I said, this is what a younger brother ought to do."

"..."

Kamito swallowed his words and reluctantly pinned the hair ornament.

"Hmmm, this somehow feels a bit embarrassing..."

"Don't do anything redundant, darkness spirit—"

Kamito glared at her. Just then...

A loud bell sounded throughout the city streets.

Part 7

The sun had completely set and night had fallen.

Lights from flying spirits dotted the night sky while noisy festive music resounded everywhere. This was supposed to be a scene conveying the solemnity of the Great Festival of Spirits to everyone, but Kamito was not moved the slightest.

"—Spirit knights as bodyguards, four of them huh."

Some distance away from the plaza where the dance offering was to take place, Kamito was on a building's rooftop.

Lying in a prone position, he observed the massive portable shrine advancing through the main street. The palanquin's four corners had mini-shrines for keeping magic apparatus within them.

These were the four militarized spirits that were about to be unveiled to the public.

On the stage, a princess maiden with brilliant flame-like crimson hair was preparing for the ritual.

The biggest ceremony in the Great Festival of the Spirits was the ritual dance performance offered by the princess maiden.

Pulling up his mask, Kamito leaned out from the roof.

"Let's do it, darkness spirit—"

"Fufu, affirmative."

Scattering jet-black feathers, Restia landed on the roof.

In the next instant, her figure vanished, turning into a dagger.

The jet-black blade looked as though it was forged from endless darkness itself.

Named the "Stinger," the Dagger of Black Death, this was not an elemental waffe formed from a spirit contract. It was nothing more than a weapon formed according to her will. This was a branch of shapeshifting spirit magic only accessible to a fraction of top-ranked spirits.

Kamito silently pulled out the dagger that was stabbed into an innocent family's roof.

The dagger was unexpectedly light and extremely to his liking.

Carrying the Princess Maiden of Flame, the portable shrine arrived in front of the plaza.

The music stopped and the huge crowd held their breath. Just at that instant...

A blinding flash of light exploded on the plaza.

Part 8

Suddenly ripping through space, a massive berserk spirit appeared in the middel of the plaza.

A giant beast of steel, all covered in sharp blades, commonly called the Beast of Gévaudan, it was a militarized spirit that had been deployed by the Ordesia Empire in older eras.

The spirit's sudden intrusion caused a wave of screams as the crowd entered a state of panic.

The steel beast's massive limbs swept away the open-air stalls, piercing buildings built from stone. A cloud of dust rose in the surroundings. Spirits flying in the sky flashed violently.

Having lost its rationality to Muir Alenstarl's Jester's Vise, the spirit was currently in state of rampage. Before getting broken from use, it was probably going to keep engaging in destruction at the plaza.

The spirit knights guarding the portable shrine instantly appeared. Releasing their elemental waffen, they charged at the berserk militarized spirit.

(Now is the chance—)

At the same time, Kamito took a leap in the darkness.

He swiftly moved across rooftops by leaping, approaching the portable shrine under the cover of darkness.

(Muir's militarized spirit can buy thirty seconds of time, I have to finish the job before that—"

Silently descending to the ground, he used his momentum to charge at the portable shrine.

Due to the dust cloud, his view was almost entirely blocked. However, he had already grasped the targets' locations.

Of the mini-shrines set up at the north, east, south, west corners of the portable shrine, two of them carried magic apparatus where the Demon King's spirits were sealed. All he needed to do was take the Demon King's spirits and could ignore the other two.

Under the cover of darkness and the noisy commotion, Kamito jumped onto the edge of the giant portable shrine and ran to the north mini-shrine closest to him—

"Take that!"

The demon blade stabbed into the mini-shrine's door.

The door was easily broken, revealing the magic apparatus kept inside. The enshrined object was ancient single-edged blade. Sealed inside was the Demon King's spirit.

'—Indeed. Sealed here is the demon song spirit, Siren.'

Restia's voice sounded in his mind.

Forcibly cutting the barrier open, Kamito took the sword-shaped magic apparatus. Securing the heavy sword on his back, he immediately prepared to steal the next target—But just at that moment...

"...! You there, what are you doing here!"

An invisible slash swept lightly across Kamito's cheek from the darkness. Stepping back reflexively, he pulled away and faced off against the enemy.

(...A spirit knight huh.)

Standing before his eyes was a female knight using an elemental waffe in the form of a full moon blade.

Evidently only three of the knights had gone to suppress Muir's militarized spirit, leaving one to guard this place.

"...To think it's a child!?"

The knight could not believe her eyes for a moment, whispering—

But very soon, she noticed the sword on Kamito's back and exuded sharp killing intent.

"W-Watch this—"

Yelling, she swung the full moon blade horizontally.

The blade produced a gust of slicing wind flying towards him, scraping the roof of the portable shrine.

"...!"

Kamito used his demon blade to deflect the wind blade then hid desperately in the darkness.

The mission was ultimately about stealing the sealed spirits. There was nothing to gain from excess fighting.

(Muir's spirit will last for fifteen more seconds—)

"Don't think you can escape by jumping!"

Enveloped in fierce wind, the knight chased after him. She soon circled around in front of Kamito.

(...Gah, this sword is so heavy...!)

The sword sealing the Demon King's spirit was no small burden for Kamito's relatively small frame. Under such conditions, the assassination sword techniques of his specialty were unusable.

"Give up!"

Faced with the swinging full moon blade, Kamito hastily blocked with the Stinger.

"G-Gah...!"

A clash of blades. However, Kamito had no hopes of winning a pure contest of strength. Compared to the knight's weapon which was the elemental waffe of a contracted spirit, Kamito's demon blade was nothing more than an item transformed from Restia according to her own will. There was an overwhelming difference between the two.

'—You're hopeless, Kamito. I'll lend you a hand.'

At this moment, the demon blade spoke. Instantly, lightning erupted from the jet-black blade—!

"...Wha, ah, ahhhhhhhhhh!"

Struck by black lightning, the knight screamed and backed away.

Seizing this opening, Kamito lunged forward—

"Hah!"

He stabbed the demon blade into the armor.

"...Guh, ah...!"

The sound of armor shattering. Eyes opened wide, the knight fell in the darkness.

"Huff, huff, huff—"

'Kamito, you didn't take a life, did you?'

Restia's voice was uncharacteristically anxious.

"I'm not gonna do something that stupid—"

While whispering, Kamito ran to the south side of the portable shrine.

As the Demon King's successor, Kamito was the only person in the Instructional School forbidden from taking human life despite being a trained assassin. This was because the old men believed that random commoners were unworthy of being the Demon King's first sacrifice. Only by personally killing the one he treasured most would the condition be fulfilled for the Demon King's awakening.

However, the treasured person who truly had value in being killed—For Kamito whose normal human emotions had been taken away, it was hard to imagine the day when he would find something like that—

'Good. After all, the one you must kill is—'

"Hold on, there's someone in front of the shrine!?"

Restia's whisper was overwhelmed by Kamito's voice.

Amidst the endless screaming—

That girl was unshaken by the surrounding chaos, standing quietly in the darkness.

She had crimson hair that resembled flames. With ruby eyes carrying unyielding determination, she glared at Kamito.

"—I know not who you are, but I shall not let you have this spirit!"

With a flutter of her ceremonial outfit's hem, the girl spoke solemnly.

(...C-Could this be the Princess Maiden of Flame!?)

Kamito silently groaned.

Her presence was completely unexpected. The instant Muir Alenstarl's militarized spirit appeared, she should have been evacuated by the bodyguard knights.

(...Did she stay back, intending to guard the sealed spirits?)

"Rubia-sama, it's very dangerous, please come back!"

Under the portable shrine, the guards wailed.

"No, guarding this place is my duty as a princess maiden. Please stand down."

Saying that, the Princess Maiden of Flame opened the door to the mini-shrine behind her.

She took out the enshrined sounding staff and silently prepared a stance.

The staff with the Demon King's spirit sealed in it had a gemstone embedded in its front end, glowing with bright red light.

'Kamito, watch out!'

"...! No way, she's planning to release that militarized spirit!?"

The princess maiden was clearly not an elementalist trained in combat. However, her divine power reserves would surpass an ordinary spirit knight's.

Suppose that was true, then controlling a large militarized spirit singlehandedly was not impossible—

(Then I have to hurry before the militarized spirit is released—)

Holding the demon blade, Kamito rushed forward all at once.

However, a magic circle appeared at the princess maiden's feet in that instant, pouring a surge of blazing flames.

Appearing out of the magic circle was a two-headed hound all covered in flames. She must have set up automatically activating magic beforehand as a precaution.

"—Time to hunt, Lava Hound!"

The flaming hound pounced at Kamito's throat.

Kamito clicked his tongue and switched the demon blade to a reverse grip—

Then he drew out another mithril dagger from his chest.

"Assassination technique—Dual Snakes!"

Two slashes flew through the darkness, chopping the two-headed hound into halves.

However, just before vanishing, the lava hound turned into magical fire, roaring in Kamito's surroundings.

(Stalling for time eh—)

Kamito brushed the flames aside with the demon blade and rushed forward.

At this time, the Princess Maiden of Flame's incantation of release was about to finish.

"One of the Demon King's servants, ruling over blazing flames of crimson, show thyself at this time and place—"

'—Kamito, this is bad. Let's retreat.'

Restia's acute voice swept across his mind.

WOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!

The roar of a beast came from the other side of the plaza. Either the spirit knights had defeated Muir's militarized spirit or the spirit had been broken by the Jester's Vise, self-destructing.

(...But the mission's objective is to steal two spirits of the Demon King's.)

'You have already stolen one successfully. That should be enough—'

Indeed, once the three spirit knights who had gone to the plaza returned, there was no hope of winning. Obsessing over the second spirit would also endanger Muir who was hiding nearby.

(...Gah, is the opportunity lost...?)

Just as Kamito decided to retreat and was about to turn around to leave...

(...My foot!?)

By the time he noticed, faint light was glowing underfoot.

This was bind magic for immobilizing someone.

(—I can't believe she can use spirit magic while chanting a releasing incantation!?)

Kamito groaned in surprise... It was almost impossible to believe. To be able to control such high-level spirit magic at such a young age, this talent was enough to rival the most elite of the continent's princess maidens, the Queens—

Hastily, Kamito stabbed the demon blade into the ground, dispelling the magic.

—However, it was too late. The Princess Maiden of Flame had already raised the sounding staff towards the sky.

"Thou shalt display the might of berserk violence—the hell flame spirit named Ifrit."

The instant she chanted the words of releasing...

The sounding staff in her hand erupted with intense light.

Appearing forth was a scarlet archdemon whose entire body was enveloped in scorching conflagration.

"O fool, repent your sins and turn into charcoal—"

Saying that, the Princess Maiden of Flame swung the sounding staff downwards.

The archdemon inhaled deeply and spewed flaming breath at Kamito.

"...!?"

Spreading radially, the flaming breath was too wide to escape.

Just a moment before Kamito was about to be devoured by the flames—

'—Don't worry, Kamito. I shall protect you.'

Restia's calm voice sounded.

The Stinger disappeared from Kamito's hand—

Then appearing before his eyes was the darkness spirit girl, spreading her twin wings of jet black.

"...Darkness spirit!? You—"

Restia lightly extended her hand at the crimson blaze.

With a flutter of gorgeous black hair, beautiful feathers of jet black scattered and incinerated.

"...Hmm, what... amazing, heat... As expected of, Demon King's spirit, ah... However—"

Restia blocked the overwhelming flames released by Ifrit.

Exuding dark miasma from her entire body, she blew the flames away.

"Huff, huff, huff..."

"Unbelievable, a humanoid high-ranked spirit!?"

The princess maiden exclaimed in surprise.

"Darkness spirit...!"

"Hurry and go, Kamito—"

"Ahhh—"

Carrying her emaciated form in his arms, Kamito vanished into the darkness.

Part 9

—After that, Kamito and his team escaped the imperial capital amidst the chaos.

Despite the heavy security at the entrances, through the escape route prepared by Lily beforehand, they were able to successfully mix themselves among a caravan heading for the Alphas Theocracy.

"—Mission failed huh."

The first experience made Kamito sigh.

He tightly gripped the sword containing the sealed Demon King's spirit.

"You managed to steal one of the Demon King's spirits. In terms of results, that's not bad at all."

Holding onto Kamito's back while on horseback, Restia shrugged and whispered.

"But carrying me in your arms to escape was such a poor decision. I'd simply return to Astral Zero if destroyed, so you should have escaped on your own back then—"

In contrast to her attitude, she seemed to be in quite a good mood.

"Once you disappear, coming back isn't so simple, is it? I need a weapon."

Kamito answered with a scowl.

"Well, whatever you say—"

Restia chuckled—Suddenly she placed her hand on the front of her hair.

"Too bad the ornament you bought for me was melted by that spirit's flames..."

"...That kind of thing can just be bought again."

"Huh?"

"...Nothing."

Giving the horse a lash with the whip, Kamito increased their speed.

"Darkness spirit—"

"What is it, Kamito?"

"I will be the one to kill you... Before that happens, don't die by anyone else's hand."

"Very well. I'll look forward to it."